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FP-15-16 Assortative Mating: Racial Homogamy in U.S. Marriages, 1964-2014

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Assortative Mating

Racial Homogamy in U.S. Marriages, 1964-2014



Esther Lamidi, Susan L. Brown, & Wendy D. Manning

Couples tend to mate assortatively, selecting spouses who are like themselves. Spousal homogamy, marriage between a couple with similar demographic characteristics (i.e., age, education, race/ethnicity), is commonplace. Heterogamy, or disparity between spouses on these dimensions, is linked to lower relationship quality and marital stability (Booth & Edwards, 1992). This Family Profile Series examines trends in marital age, education, and racial heterogamy using data on marriages from five decades of the Current Population Survey (1964-2014). Spousal racial homogamy describes marriages between spouses with the same racial background (i.e., intraracial marriages). We examine racial homogamy among Black and White couples over the past fifty years. The profile also presents generational shifts in intraracial marriages in the U.S.

Trends in Racial Homogamy Among Black and White Couples

- Intraracial coupling remains the dominant marriage pattern among Black and White couples in the U.S. The vast majority of Black and White Americans (95%) marry within their racial groups.
- The share of racially homogamous Black and White couples has been on a slow but steady decline since 1970.
 - In 1964, virtually all Black and White marriages involved spouses from similar racial backgrounds.
 - By 2014, 95% of Black and White marriages were racially homogamous (Figure 1).

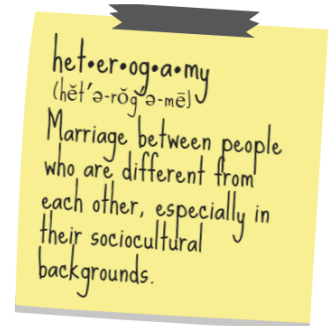
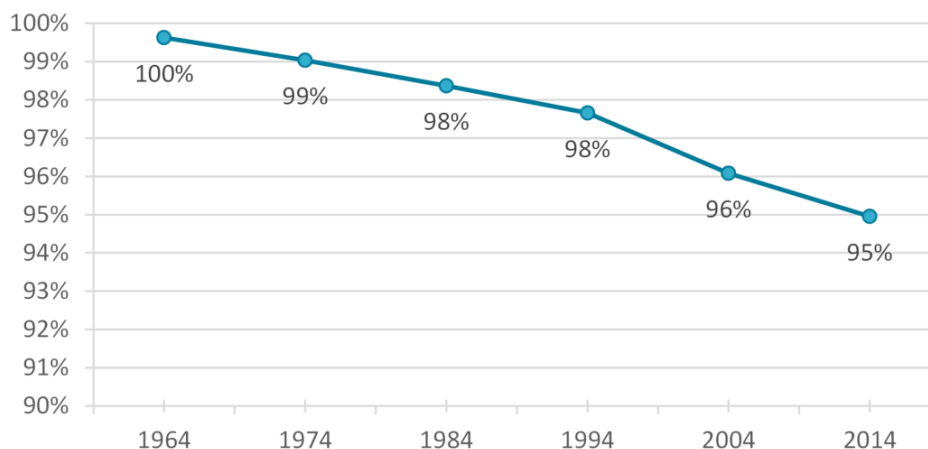


Figure 1. Trends in Racial Homogamy Among Black and White Couples in the U.S., 1964-2014



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1964-2014

References:

American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition. Copyright © 2011 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

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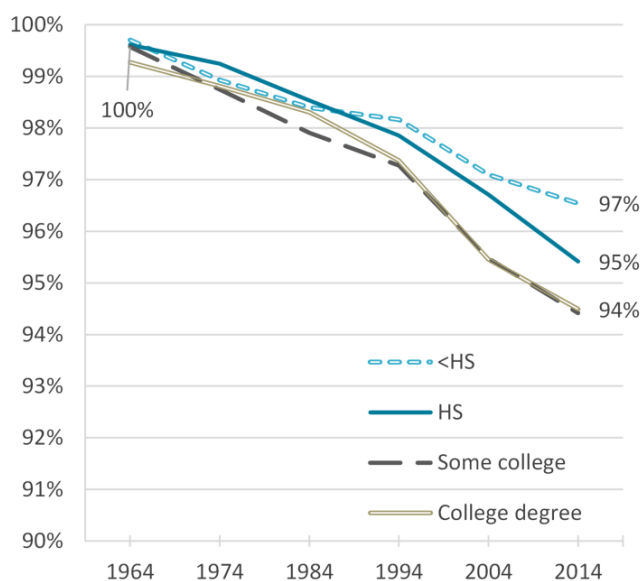
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Educational Similarities and Differences in Racial Homogamy Among Black and White Couples

The decline in racially homogamous Black and White couples since the early 1970s cuts across all levels of education, but it is more pronounced at higher educational levels.

- The share of intraracially married Black and White couples with less than high school degrees diminished by 3% from 100% in 1964 to 97% in 2014.
- College-educated couples experienced a greater decline (5%) in racial homogamy over the same time period (99% in 1964 to 94% in 2014).

Figure 2. Educational Similarities and Differences in Racial Homogamy Among Black and White Couples in the U.S., 1964-2014



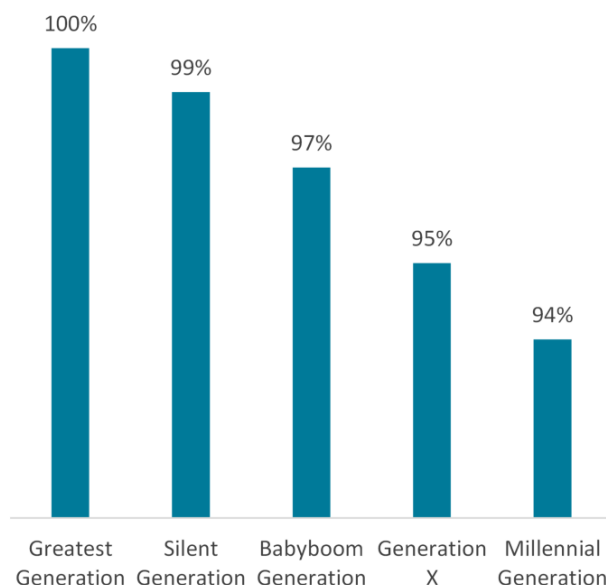
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1964-2014

Generational Differences in Racial Homogamy Among Black and White Couples

The U.S. is experiencing a decline in spousal racial homogamy across generations, from the oldest to the youngest.

- Among members of the Greatest Generation (Americans born before 1928), all Black and White marriages were racially homogamous.
- In contrast, the Millennial Generation (born between 1983 and 1997) stands out among its predecessors as having the smallest share (94%) of intraracially married couples.

Figure 3. Generational Differences in the Share of Racially Homogamous Black and White Couples in the U.S., 1964-2014



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